

The Angels Of Eryia

Chapter 2: Chosen By the Gods

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“Father of Fire, we beseech you! Judge justly these men who took the blood of our Earth Mother! They are unholy, wrought from their consorting with demons! We now baptize them with the Mother’s blood, as they had taken it from her to give to the Machine! If they are holy, we ask you Father to allow them to be born again from the blood anew, and that they be healed from their curse of silence, and become one of your chosen!”

“Let them be freed from the demon ERYIA and give them their tongues, let the Mother have mercy, and allow them to join us as green men!” the masses said in response, as they always did. “For those that have the Earth Mother’s mercy are therefore loved by the Father of Fire!”

It was easily the hundredth time that River had listened to her father deliver this speech before the baptizing, but yet it never grew any less worrisome. His green men had taken yet another settlement of the tongueless, and it was time to see which of them the Father and Mother would have mercy on. The tongueless were cursed for spilling the blood of the Mother so that they could feed their demons hundreds of years ago, and thus they had to be baptized in the blood. It was simple enough. If one could emerge from the blood on their own they were truly holy, and they could become brothers and sisters. If, however, they did not emerge then the Mother had not forgiven them, and they would go on for judgment from the Father.

Her father, the high priest of the green, chosen avatar of the Fire Father himself had brought back the captives yesterday. It had been a month since he had left with his green men. Too long. The high priest could speak for both the Father and Mother as he was the holiest of

holy men. His daughters were blessed as well, and one could only speak for one of the two gods. River spoke for the Earth Mother on behalf of the green men who stayed behind in the sacred lands around the pool of the Mother's blood. Her sister, Forest, spoke on behalf of the Father of Fire when their father was gone. However the Mother and Father were in disagreement right now, and the common folk were starting to lose faith. The holy man could put this wrong to rights.

The tongueless stood there afraid, as they always did. They did not understand because of the curse bestowed upon them by the demon that they worshipped. Nevertheless the Father and Mother understood, and they would test them. The pool of the Mother's blood was not wide, and had it been water anyone could swim through it. But it was infinitely deep, and the blood was black and thick, and few who were submerged ever came out. The green men marched the tongueless one at a time towards the pit. Forest stood on the opposite side from River and gave them the father's blessing before they were thrown in. The first one did not emerge, and the tongueless grew restless, but they had no choice but to proceed with the baptism.

There were dozens of captives today, but by the end of the baptism River had only given the Mother's blessing to five of them. The Father was wrought today, that much was clear. His fire burnt harshly in the sky, judging all of those whose hearts were pledged to the machine demons. Once all of the tongueless had met their end or been anointed, the green men went into cheers. There would be a feast tonight, River did not doubt that. However, for now she had to bestow the Mother's care unto the survivors and went about her business.

The five tongueless that remained were scared, and covered in the Mother's blood. Black was all over them. But that was their payment for taking the sacred blood and sacrificing it to their machines. River did not speak to them while they were covered in the black, only once

they were pure could she give them the blessing. She brought them to the river and bathed them in the Mother's milk. By sunset their sins had washed away. She clothed them in the blessed clothes of the green men, and gave them water to drink and bread to eat. On the morrow they would begin to learn how to speak so that they could spread the good news. But tonight, their hearts were still with ERYIA, the worst of the demons, and they would need to be guarded. It would be an easy lot to guard this time, only three men, one woman, and a young boy survived the baptism. They were all unarmed, and none looked in shape to fight. After whispering a command to the guard at the tent River took her leave to go find her father.

Her father sat at the high table beneath the Father's guardsmen. Tonight the chief guard was full in the sky, as it was every thirty days, and the smaller guards were abundant as well. They would guard the mother and her children every time the darkness came, and would await for the Father to return and bring light. It was a good sign when the guards above shone bright, that meant the day was blessed. When he saw her, the high priest summoned her to sit next to him.

"My daughter, the speaker of the Mother, holy priestess of the green, may the Father guide you and the Mother bless you," the high priest said to her as she sat down, as was custom.

"Your holiness, father of my blood, avatar of the true gods and protector of the holy people, you are truly blessed by the Mother, and upheld by the Father, may the gods continue to bless you," she responded. Her father nodded in approval of the response, though he did not smile. He never smiled, the Father of Fire had brought him above smiling. A man as holy as him knew that as long as the tongueless continued to commit blasphemies and worship the demons of the east, there was nothing to smile about. Once his service was done and he returned

to the Mother's halls he could smile. She turned to him, "You have been gone for the whole turn of the Chief Guard, did all go well, your holiness?"

"I saw many more of the demons than even I had last time. This land is surely cursed by the tongueless and their false gods. There is still much work to be done before the world is forgiven of its sins against the Mother. However we did not encounter those who wielded the demon's weapons, and none of the green men were struck down. For that we must be thankful. Now tell me, River, what went wrong in my absence?"

She knew she would have to bring up the subject sooner or later, though she had been hoping later. She prayed to the Mother for mercy before she spoke, "Forest has gone too far!"

The high priest cut her off, "Your sister speaks with the voice of the Father. If you blaspheme her you blaspheme Him, and that is unforgivable."

"Forgive me," she said, "I did not mean to speak ill. It's just that she is teaching the green men that the Mother and Father will be cut off again, as had happened three hundred years ago when the tongueless and their demons attacked the Mother and her people, and the long darkness came. There is much discord amongst the holy people because of this."

"Tell me, River," her father said sternly but not unkindly, "Do you believe this?"

"No," she admitted, "The Earth Mother has not told me of such. Is there truth to her claims?"

"Sometimes the Father and the Mother speak differently because the future is not set in stone. If the holy one is found then the demons will be destroyed and the green men will rule the world in glory of the Father, under the blessing of the Mother," he paused and looked at the guards sparkling in the sky. "However, the demon's following grows, and the tongueless grow stronger. If the holy one is not found then the demon's fire will fall from the sky again, and the

Mother will bleed, and the Father will leave us again, never to return. If the great darkness comes again, the Mother and her children, green and tongueless both, will be lost.”

“We must find the chosen one then!” River pleaded.

The high priest looked at the guards in the sky, “We have.”

River looked at the boy with curiosity. For the most part he seemed like a normal little boy who had not seen quite a dozen cycles of the Father. He was slightly dark skinned with short black hair, and the beginnings of what would one day be a muscular physique. Then she noticed his eyes. His eyes were scared, but there was more to it than that, they were off colored. One was green and the other yellow, she turned to her father, “His eyes... Is that how you know he is the chosen one?”

“That is part of it. The yellow eye reflects the Father of Fire, and the green the Mother. There is no doubt about it,” he paused and stared upwards for a moment to get more advice from the Father of Fire. “There is something else. His eyes alone could simply be a deception from the machine devil to trick us into allowing this boy into our camps. Look at his stomach.”

River curiously took note. At first it seemed like just a stomach, smooth and skinny except for a little bit of bloating from hunger. Then right before she asked what it was she was looking for, she saw it. The boy had no navel. River gasped out loud, “He was not born of a woman!”

“When the Mother bleeds, and the Father’s fury comes down to avenge her, the demons will rise up to make the tongueless blind as well. If the silence continues to go, the sin of the machine users will end us all. If there are still those who are holy and pure, those who cherish the Mother, and worship her, then the Father of Fire and Mother of Earth will conceive a child of virgin birth. He will have eyes of glory, and no blood sin of man. Sinners will face his fury, and

the heathens shall be damned. He will be young and silent, but grow strong and loud. He will save the pious, and make the Father proud.”

River shuddered as the high priest repeated the ancient prophecy. She had heard it so many times before, but now it was being fulfilled. The boy had not yet proven the deeds that the prophecy promised true, but he fit the description perfectly. There was no doubt that this boy was indeed the redeemer they long awaited. She was about to speak when her sister came rushing into the tent, “Father, sister, I am sorry that I am late. I had to pray with the men before I came, what is so important?”

The high priest explained, and Forest listened intently. After the high priest was done reiterating what he had just explained to River, Forest got down on her knee to examine the boy closely. She tapped the bracelet on her wrist, “I see. This boy does seem to fit the description. But, I do have one question, if I may be so bold. Why was this boy with the tongueless? I understand that he is supposed to be silent, but he was among the heathens when you found him, only one who comes of ERYIA would be among them.”

“Those who survive the trial of the Earth Mother’s blood are marked holy no matter what their past. The gods have yet to tell me what this boy was doing with the heathens, but there is no doubt that the Father of Fire sent him so that we may find him and raise him up.”

“It is not my place to question you, your holiness,” Forest bowed politely. “I have the Father’s business to attend to, may I be excused?”

The high priest nodded, and Forest was out as quickly as she came, her long silk hair blew wistfully behind her as she exited the tent. Father turned to her now, “Go with your sister, River. Try to cool her. Your sister speaks with the voice of the Father, but she also has His fury. She has long mistrusted the tongueless for what they have done to the Earth Mother. Cool her

with your waters, she must see the boy is truly the chosen one. One day I will be reunited with the Mother, and when that happens if the chosen one is not ready she will lead our people, with you beside her. If it comes to that she must not neglect this boy. He is our only hope.”

“Yes, father,” River kissed him gently on the cheek before she left herself.

It was several days before she found the chance to speak to her sister one on one. Both were very busy most days, and Forest seemed to be avoiding her. River found her sitting by a stream in deep prayer. As she approached, Forest turned and acknowledged her with a nod, “Sister.”

River sat down beside her and stared up at the guardsmen so bright in the dark sky. Both were silent for a moment, and she used the time to ask the Mother for guidance. Finally she spoke with hesitation, “Forest, the boy is the chosen one. Our father knows he is. We are chosen by the Father of Fire and the Earth Mother as well, but individually, the high priest speaks to both. He knows that this boy is the one, he fits the prophecy.”

“Do not be so naïve. Our father has aged to the point where he can no longer be trusted to speak for the gods. I know what my human father tells me, and I know what the Father above tells me, and they are not the same. The Father of Fire never ages, He burns with his glory for eternity. Our father is a great man, yes, but a man nonetheless. He does not understand that this boy will lead to our destruction, not our salvation.”

A flash of anger swept across River at her sister’s words, “How dare you question the High Priest! He may be old, but he still has more wisdom and wits than both of us put together. Your words anger the gods.”

“Listen to the Earth Mother, sister!” Forest urged her passionately. She took her hands in hers and lowered them to the ground, “She has been destroyed, harmed by the tongueless! Do

you truly believe that one of them was chosen to be her redeemer? No, it is a lie, a trick of the demons! You've seen what the demons can do! ERYIA produces abominations at its very existence, that is all this boy is.

"The chosen one will come from the green men! It is the only way. Only our blood is pure enough. Our blood is one with the Mothers, our soul's burn like the Father's eternal flame. No doubt that is what the prophecy is referring to. Open your ears to the truth, I love our holy father as much as you do, but I am not so blind as to be fooled by him. He is after all just a man, but this boy, this boy is evil. I can sense it, he will bring our down fall!"

River slapped her across the cheek, "Do not speak of the chosen one that way! Do not speak of our father that way! If it weren't for him, you would not have the gifts given you."

Forest's face flushed with anger for a moment, then she turned away almost sadly, "If you will not see, be gone then."

With that River left hurriedly. Her sister and her had often been at odds since they were both young children. Forest had been born ten minutes before she had, and by that small right was the one who the gods had given authority. Still, River found herself questioning why. Even as young girls they were simultaneously the best of friends, and the worst of enemies. As adults, and priestesses of the green men they now had learned how to get a long, but this did not mean that they never bickered. Still, she prayed to the Earth Mother that her sister would see the error in her ways and come to understand that the boy was truly the chosen one.

She went to his tent now, as she did every night, to work with him. The boy was sleeping when she came in, but he woke quickly, and smiled when he saw her. It seemed that he was getting a long well, much better than most of their converts. He did not mourn the tongueless who were lost at the hands of the green men for their sins, which meant that he must have

understood that they were sinners. He was a quick learner as well. Within the week that he had been with the green men he had already gained a few basic phrases and words, and was beginning to understand bigger concepts. River had even managed to teach him two prayers, one to the Earth Mother, and one to the Father of Fire.

“Hello,” said the boy.

“Hello,” replied River, she sat down next to him with a smile on her face. In a way the boy almost seemed like the son she never had. She was coming to love him, and she liked to think that he also was coming to love her. It mattered not, her job was to educate the boy to speak, and in the holy practices. Others would teach him battle, and others still the sciences. She would have him under her care for a short time, and then she would give him to the warriors, and the scribes of the green men for further training. For now at least she would enjoy her time with him.

“Pray?” asked the boy, they had not named him for the high priest believed that the Father and Mother would send a name to them when the time was appropriate.

“Pray!” agreed River. They both went to their knees, and River started, the chosen one repeated whatever she said, “Oh Father of Fire, in your eternal glory, light this prayer with your benevolence. Mother of Earth, in your loving care, guide us both as your true children. We pray to You as we would ask our earthly mothers and fathers for something we needed, but they are just men, and You are the two true gods. Forever and eternity you watch your children, forever...”

Their prayer was interrupted at that point by the sound of shouting, and a loud noise which River had not heard in a long time. She realized after a moment that the sound was that of the heathen’s long ranged weapons. Unholy objects made out of machinery that could kill

someone from yards away. They were truly of the devil, but deadly nonetheless. It only took her a moment to realize that the green men were under attack.

She knew that she had to protect the boy at all costs. She grabbed him by the hand, and led him to the exit. Outside there was shouting and screaming, the scent of blood and fire filled the air. As far as she could see, her way was clear, and she quickly, yet quietly led the chosen one around the tent, being constantly vigilante of her surroundings. Her mind was in a panic, and she tried to level it by repeating prayers in her head over and over again. Yet still when she looked at the boy's face, eyes full of fear, his dark skin almost pale, she felt scared herself. But she had to be strong, she was his mother, she would not let him down.

As they went she saw one of the green men fall dead from being attacked by the tongueless, but the murderer was quickly overcome by two other green men with their spears. Dead and injured lay across the camp, some from her own people, some from the invaders. She had no time to pay any of them mind, she had to reach the woods and go into hiding before they were found. Without warning several of the tongueless men's projectiles whizzed passed her head, and she found herself under fire. She ran as quickly as she could, without thinking, completely aimlessly, until everything was quiet, and she found herself in the woods.

There was a waterfall that she knew of that was not far away. Behind it was a hidden cave. She knew that if they could reach it they would be safe until the attack was over. The two silently traveled through the darkness, only the guardsmen gave them light, and it was treacherous to see. But in the end the darkness helped them evade attack, and soon they were safe behind the waterfall.

After she had calmed the boy she told him to stay put while she went to find her father and sister, and inspect the situation outside. Right as she went to turn she shrieked in surprise as

a man came stumbling into the falls and fell on the ground in front of her, blood was streaming from his chest. Before she could react she realized that the man was her father, she rushed to him and picked him off of the ground.

His eyes were glazed and appeared to not be staring at anything in particular. She took his hand, and found that it was cold, weaker than she had ever felt it. He had always had such strong hands. Callused and muscular, and always warm, but now they betrayed their age. His wound was bad, several holes lay in his chest from where he had been attacked, and his lifeblood came pouring out, it was obvious that he needed attention immediately.

“River... Is that you?” the high priest asked meekly, if he ever were just a mere man, that time was now.

“Yes, father,” River kept her voice from betraying her tears. “I’m here, it’s okay.”

Her father chuckled, “No, no it’s not. I am going to be reunited with the Mother tonight, but that’s okay. It is my time. Is the chosen one safe?”

“Yes, he’s right here, I made sure no harm came to him.”

“Good,” the high priest coughed up spittle filled with blood, and wheezed. For a second he started to shake, and River thought for sure that it was the end. But then he seemed to calm down and spoke again, “He is our only hope... He is the chosen one. Help your sister see that... He is...”

His last breath came quickly after, and his body went limp and still. River held him in her arms and sobbed gently. She did not want the boy to see her weakness, but she could not hold it in. The man had been her father, the leader of their people, her hero, and her protector. He had sometimes been cold, but he had given her and her sister everything, and now he had

returned to the Mother for good. The boy still noticed her despair and came up behind her and leaned his head on her shoulder, he was crying too, and they sobbed together.

River did not dare return to the camp until morning. Thanks to the gods the green men had won the battle, but they suffered heavy losses. Wailing came from all directions, some from pain, some from sorrow. Smoke was visible at many places, and half of the tents that they camped in were destroyed or at least torn down. Blood was everywhere. She feared for her sister, and made haste to find her, if she lost her father and sister in the same night, she did not know what she would do.

Forest was giving orders to the green men when she came upon her. She turned and rushed up to her, and took River's hands in hers, and they embraced. After River explained what had happened to their father Forest's eyes were red with tears, but she stayed strong. She gathered herself, "Go back and fetch the boy, we need the chosen one. Do not leave him alone."

River obeyed and did as she was bid. The Father was high in the sky when she returned. At this point Forest had gathered the green men around her for a speech, and when she saw that her sister and the boy had returned she smiled and beckoned for them to come join her. After they all stood in front of their people, her sister said a prayer to the Father of Fire as she always did, and River followed with a prayer to the Earth Mother before the meeting began.

"Green men!" Forest shouted so that all may hear. "Last night the demon ERYIA sent her tongueless to destroy us! But they failed, for we are chosen! Still, they sent many of our brothers and sisters back to the Earth Mother, may they be blessed for eternity, and among them was the high priest!"

The green men started to mumble angrily, some of them shouted for vengeance, others for mercy on the high priest's soul. Forest waited for them to quiet down, "I have asked the

Father why the tongueless came, and why so many have been lost. He has told me that it is because we sinned grievously! We took an abomination of the demon, and raised him up. For this sin, the Father allowed us to suffer, and allowed our leader to die. Yet, this thing that we took as a spoiled gift from the demon ERYIA still lives, and here he stands!" She pointed at the chosen boy, and River gasped.

"No!" she shouted. They were wrong, the boy was the chosen one, he had to be. What was Forest doing? Yet the people rose up in angry shouting and her words fell upon them unheard. Forest clapped her hands together and they all quieted, "Do not be discontent. The gods have told me that this wrong can be made right. Seize the boy, and make sure he is well guarded. The Father of Fire will accept his blood as a sacrifice for atonement, and the green men will be holy again! He burns at dawn!"

There was shouting, and calls for death. River ran up to her sister to try to reason with her, but the woman turned and walked away. She tried to stop the men from arresting the boy, but they pushed her aside, forgetting their place. The world was spinning, she could not let this happen, but it was happening. The green men were going to burn the chosen one. They thought it would redeem them, but in the end it would only spell out their own doom. River collapsed where she stood and fell on her knees in prayer. Her sister was mad, and needed to be stopped.

By evening she knew what must be done. She drugged the drinks of the guards who watched over the boy, and came to his tent after dark. Both guards were asleep on the ground, and no one else was in sight. She snuck into the tent, and found the chosen one entrapped in a wooden cage. He did not look like a mighty hero, he looked frightened, he knew what her people had in store for him. Still she unlocked his cage, and signaled for him to be silent.

Getting out of the camp unnoticed was the hard part, but they managed to do it, and go into the forest safely. She knew that she had to take the boy somewhere that he would be safe. She would raise him as her own, and they would live in exile from both the green men and the tongueless. But one day he would become the chosen one that he was meant to be, and with the gods on their side they would return and redeem her people. They had made a mistake, but they were still the holy people of the Earth Mother.

River knew not to try and hide in the waterfall cave. It was too close, and the green men knew of it, it would be the first place they would look. Instead they traveled north and east, rarely stopping for more than a drink when they passed a stream. The more distance they put in between them and the green men, the better. If they had not discovered that they were missing yet, they would soon enough, and they would not hesitate to pursue them.

Soon they were lost, but River took this as a good sign. If they were lost the chances of them being found were slim. However, her hope was short lived. The Father of Fire was coming over the horizon when she heard them. Dozens of men making their way through the forest, far away she saw flames behind them. She grabbed the boys hand and they ran, but no matter how far they ran, the green men were behind them, still gaining ground. It was then she realized that they had their dogs tracking them, if the two stayed together all was lost.

Finally she found a shallow river. She knelt in front of the boy, and looked at him intently, "Follow this river. Stay in it for as long as you can. If you are in it they can not track you. You are the chosen one, you must be kept alive."

"River?" he asked. "You River."

He had barely understood what she said, "No, this river. Go, go now. Go!" After a few moments he finally grasped what she was saying, and with tears in his eyes he ran, thankfully

staying in the river bed. River herself got out and continued on foot by land. By the time the Father of Fire was full in the sky she was too tired to go on, and her people found her hiding behind a large boulder.

Forest waited for their return. The look on her face was full of anger. Yet she still spoke calmly when her sister was dumped at her feet, “Where’s the boy?”

“He’s gone,” River managed a smile. “He got away, and you can not have him. He is the chosen one, you will see. He will come back, and save us all.”

“He is a demon spawn,” her sister spat. “His sacrifice was needed for our redemption, and you helped him get away! You are a traitor to the gods, sister. If the boy can not be found, then you will be the needed sacrifice to avenge us. Build a pyre, and get Mother’s blood to soak it in.”

River did not speak, she did not protest as they piled the wood thick and high. She said nothing when they bound her to the pyre, nor even when they poured the thick black liquid that was the Mother’s blood over her. She would die doing what she knew was right, she would die in the Mother’s blood, and that was honorable.

As the green men prayed, River had her own prayer. She prayed for her people’s redemption, she prayed for the safety and success of the chosen one, and she prayed that with in the hour she would be reunited with her father. Soon enough the ceremonies were done. She barely saw the torch before there was a loud whoosh, and a bright flash, brighter than the Father’s flames. For a moment everything was bright, glowing, eerily beautiful. Then came the pain.

The last thing that River heard was the sound of her own screams.